

## Finding Places in the Former Russian Empire

### PURPOSE

Describe jurisdiction of genealogical significance and identifies the key gazetteers and maps that help a searcher locate places. The place names vary significantly because of boundary changes and variant transcription systems used to convert Cyrillic to Latin characters.

### JURISDICTIONS

Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltics were previously in the Russian Empire. In 1708 Peter the Great divided Russia into eight large provinces (*guberniia*). It time these were subdivided into counties (*uezd*). In 1775 Catherine the Great increased the number of provinces to 40 (average of 10 counties each). In 1797 each county (*uezd*) was divided into districts (*volost*) and villages (*derevnya* or *selo*; a *selo* normally had a church). A city (*gorod*) was independent of the county/district hierarchy. This organization remained stable throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of provinces increasing to 50 in European Russian (excluding Finland and Poland). An *oblast* was the Asiatic Russian equivalent of a *guberniia*. The Soviets used the term *oblast* for the highest jurisdictional level and created more of them. Records of modern states may be found in the archive of another state that was an imperial capital. They also instituted the region (raion) to replace both the county and district levels.

To identify the residence of an ancestor and the pertinent archive, you must understand the changes in jurisdictions, particularly in border areas:

Historical Name	Time Period	Belonged To
Banat	before 1918	Austrian Empire
	after 1918	East to Romania, West to Yugoslavia (North Serbia)
Bessarabia	before 1918	Ottoman Empire
	after 1812	Russian Empire
	after 1918	Romania
	after 1945	West to Moldova, East to Ukraine
Bucovina	before 1774	Ottoman Empire
	after 1774	Austrian Empire
	after 1918	Romania
	after 1945	North to Ukraine, South to Romania
Courland or Kurland	before 1945	Russia Empire
	after 1918	Latvia
East Prussia	before 1945	German Empire then Germany
	after 1945	North to Kaliningrad (Russia), South to Poland
Estland	before 1918	Russian Empire
	after 1918	Estonia
Galicia	before 1772	Kingdom of Poland
	after 1772	Austrian Empire
	after 1918	Poland
	after 1945	East to Ukraine, West to Poland
Grodno	before 1921	Russian Empire
	after 1921	Poland

Historical Name	Time Period	Belonged To
	after 1945	East to Belarus, West to Poland
Kovno	before 1918	Russian Empire
	after 1918	Lithuania
Livland or Livonia	before 1918	Russian Empire
	after 1918	North to Estonia, South to Latvia
Memel	before 1918	East Prussia, German Empire
	after 1918	Lithuania
Kingdom of Poland	after 1772-1795	E. to Russian, N. to Prussian, S. to Austrian Empires
	after 1918	Poland
	after 1939	Northeast to Belarus; Southeast to Ukraine
Suwalki	before 1918	Kingdom of Poland
	after 1918	North to Lithuania, South to Poland
Ruthenia or Transcarpathia	before 1918	Hungarian Empire
	after 1918	Czechoslovakia
	after 1945	Ukraine
Vilna	before 1918	Russian Empire
	after 1921	Poland
	after 1945	North to Lithuania, South to Belarus
Vitebsk	before 1918	Russian Empire
	after 1918	North to Latvia, South to Belarus, East to Russia
Volhynia	before 1795	Kingdom of Poland
	after 1795	Russian Empire
	after 1919	Poland
	after 1945	Ukraine
Vyborg	before 1939	Finland
	after 1939	Russia

## GAZETTEERS

The basic gazetteer for the Russian Empire: *Spiski Naselennykh Mest Rossiiskoi Imperii* [List of Populated Places in Imperial Russia]. S. Petersburg: Tsentralnyi Statisticheskii Komitet Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del, 1861-1885. 62 vols. (Fiche 6,002,224 / 420 microfiches). Identifies location and religious congregations.

A modern gazetteer compiled from these lists, maps and other geographical sources: Vasmer, Max. *Russisches Geographisches Namenbuch* [Russian Geographical Namebook]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964-1981. *Nachtrag* (Supplement), 1988. 11 vols. (Book 947 E5r). Usable to non-Russian readers because the explanatory text is in German, but place names are still in Cyrillic.

A modern gazetteer for places where Jews lived: Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack. *Where Once we Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*. Revised ed. Teaneck, N.J., 2002. (Book 940 E5ms 2002). Its soundex co-locates variant renditions of the same place name.

Shtetl Seeker, an online database for places in Eastern Europe, including the former Russian Empire is at <<http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/>>. It links to maps and is very valuable to determine where the place is and if it is the correct place when there are places with the same name.

## Baltic States

Hofmann, Harry v. *Baltische Postorte 1632-1917/8* [Baltic Postal Places]. Hamburg, 1996. (Book 947.9 E8h 1996). Identifies postal offices for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by their Russian and native names.

Feldmann, Hans. *Baltisches historisches Ortslexikon* [Baltic Historical Dictionary]. Wien, 1985. 2 v. Pt. 1--Estland, Pt. 2--Lettland. (Book 947.4 E5fh). A German compilation for Estonia and Latvia that identifies the parish to which a place belonged. It is deficient in providing the Russian name for Baltic localities.

**Gazetteer of Lithuania:** Names approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names. Washington D.C. : Defense Mapping Agency, 1994. (Book 947.93 E5g). Modern gazetteer.

Lithuania was created from three imperial provinces: Vilno, Kovno, Suwalki. Gazetteers were published for all of these but only two are available in the FHL.

Kovno. *Alfavitnyi spisok naseleennykh mest Kovenskoi gubernii*. [Alphabetic list of populated places of the Kovno Province] Kovna, 1903. (Film 2,268,932 Item 1)

Vil'no (see Belarus)

## Belarus

Created from five imperial provinces: Minsk, Vilno, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Grodno. Gazetteers were published all of these except Grodno:

Minsk. Yarmolovich, V. S. *Spisok naseleennykh mest Minskoi gubernii* [Populated places in Minsk Province]. Minsk, 1909. (Film 1,923,576 item 1)

Mogilev. Pozharov, G. P. *Spisok naseleennykh mest Mogilevskoi gubernii* [Populated places in Mogilev Province]. Mogilev, 1910. (Film 1,923,576 item 2)

Vitebsk. *Spisok naseleennykh mest Vitebskoi gubernii* [Populated places in Vitebsk Province]. Vitebsk, 1906. (Film 1,923,576 item 3)

Vil'no. *Spisok volostei i sel'skikh obshchestv po mirovym uchastkom Vilenskoi gubernii* [List of volosts & towns by court district, Vilnius Prov.]. Vilnius, 1873. (Film 2,268,932 item 3)

Bystrzycki, Tadeusz. *Skorowidz miejscowosci rzeczywospolitej polskiej* [Listing of Localities of the Polish Republic]. Przemyśl, 1934. 2 v. (Book 943.8 E5sm / Film 1,343,868). Gives Polish names for territory gained by Poland after WWI and lost to the Soviet Union after WWII.

Identifies church jurisdictions. URL:

<<http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=12786>>.

## Ukraine

*Ukrains'ka RSR admynystrativno-teritoryal'niï podyl* [Ukrainian Republic Administrative Territorial Divisions]. Kiev, 1973. (Book 947.71 E5u). While this administrative directory is published for other years, the 1973 edition is the basis for locality authorities created for the Family History Library catalog.

***Istoriia Mist i Sil USSR*** [History of Towns and Villages in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic]. Kiev, 1969-1974. 26 v. (Book 947.71 E5i). Provides historical detail and name changes for places.

**Galicia & Bukovina** (Western Ukraine)

Lenius, Brian J. ***Genealogical Gazetteer of Galicia***. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Anola, Manitoba, 1999. (Book 943.86 E5L). Identifies religious jurisdictions.

***Gemeindelexikon der im Reichsrath vertretenen Königreiche und Länder ... vom 31. Dezember 1900*** [Locality Dictionary for the Crownlands and Territories Represented in the Imperial Council]. Wien, 1905-1908. Bd. 12: Galizien, Bd. 13. Bukowina [Vol. 12: Galicia, Vol. 13. Bukovina]. Provides German, Polish and Romanian versions of place names. Identifies religious jurisdictions. URL: <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/index.php>>.

**Transcarpathia**

Dvorzsák, János, comp. ***Magyarország Helységnevtára*** [Gazetteer of Hungary]. Budapest: "Havi Füzetek," 1877. Identifies religious jurisdictions. URL: <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/index.php>>.

**MAP SETS**

Historic map sets help to identify places when the location is unclear, there are multiple places with the same name, or the name varies over time.

***Generalkarte von Mitteleuropa*** [General Map of Central Europe]. Vienna, 1898-1967. 249 maps. Scale 1:200,000 (Film 1,181,580). Covers southern Belarus, western Ukraine, and Moldova. Best overall map set for these areas.  
URL: <<http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/3felmeres.htm>>.

***Mapa Polska (Taktyczna)*** [Tactical Maps of Poland]. Warsaw, 1926-1938. 483 maps. Scale 1:100,000 (Fiche 6,312,622 / 483 microfiches). Covers western Belarus and western Ukraine, areas belonging to Poland between World War I and II. Indexed by *Skorowidz miejscowosci rzeczywospolitej polskiej* (described above).  
URL: <<http://www.mapywig.org/news.php>>.

***Voенно-topograficheskie karty*** [Russian Topographical Maps]. Petersburg, 1865-1917. Several hundred maps. Scale 1:126,000 (Films 1344037 & 1344038). Covers western portion of the Russian Empire, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.

***Eastern Europe 1:250,000***. Washington D.C.: Army Map Service, 1956-1959. 219 maps (Film 1,183,629). Gives an American transliteration of the Cyrillic names.

URL: <[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/eastern\\_europe/](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/eastern_europe/)>

Indexed by: ***Index to Names on AMS 1:250,000 maps of Eastern Europe*** (series N501). (Book 947 E7 index v. 1 & 2 / Fiche 6001727 v. 1, 6001728 v. 2).